

County of Loudoun
Department of Planning
MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 15, 2009
TO: Stephen Garner, Project Manager, Land Use Review
FROM: Kelly Williams, Planner, Community Planning

SUBJECT: ZMOD 2008-0010, Ashburn Village Shopping Center Sign Plan, 2nd Referral

BACKGROUND

Saul Holdings Limited Partnership, the applicant, is requesting a Zoning Ordinance Modification (ZMOD) to permit a Comprehensive Sign Plan for the Ashburn Village Shopping Center, pursuant to the provisions of the Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance. The proposal is to specifically modify Section 5-1204(D) of the Revised 1993 Loudoun Zoning Ordinance in order to "implement a Comprehensive Sign Plan as a means of coordinating needed signage for marketing, development and operation of Ashburn Village Shopping Center".

The subject site is located at the northwest corner of Ashburn Village Boulevard and Gloucester Parkway approximately a mile south of Route 7 and is bounded to the north by Christiana Drive. The site is zoned PD-H4 (Planned Development-Residential), is approximately 27 acres and has already been fully developed with the exception of one pad site. According to the application materials, the pad site currently occupied by Burger King, which is located centrally within the development, is not included in the Comprehensive Sign Plan package.

This is the second submission of the application. The applicant has responded to first submission comments by providing a revised statement of justification, response letter and a revised Comprehensive Sign Plan dated June 2, 2009. The remaining outstanding issues are described below. This referral is intended to be supplementary to Community Planning's January 20, 2009 referral.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The site is located within the Ashburn Community in the Suburban Policy Area and is governed under the policies outlined in the Revised General Plan. The Plan designates this area for residential uses (Revised General Plan, Planned Land Use Map). The retail policies of the Countywide Retail Plan (Retail Plan) also apply.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

As stated in the first referral, this shopping center is existing and is surrounded by the existing residential community of Ashburn Village. It was noted that an update of sign design and materials may be appropriate, given the nature of this community serving retail center and its visible location in the neighborhood, however, increasing the number and size of the signs would be excessive.

The revised statement of justification indicates that the modifications to the Zoning Ordinance would allow future signage to be consistent with the standards of the existing signage. The Retail Plan specifies that signs for commercial centers should be developed as an integral part of the overall center design and that a unified graphic design scheme is strongly encouraged (*Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Signs and Lighting*). This would include scale, materials, and location of signage. In order to demonstrate how the future signs will relate to the existing permitted signage, staff requests documentation that shows information on the size, design and number of existing signs and how they compare to the requested sign modifications.

The Ashburn Village Shopping Center is located in a prominent location along a major roadway in the Ashburn Community. The shopping center is located and designed to function as a "service area-based retail" use which serves the surrounding community and is not intended to attract drive-by shoppers (*Retail Plan, Service Area-Based Retail Policies, text*). Service area based retail include "community retail centers" which are defined as those serving several residential neighborhoods with a market area of 2,000 to 8,000 households and offer a variety of daily and weekly shopping goods (*Retail Plan, Service Area-Based Retail Policies, policies 1 and 2*). As such, the majority of the shoppers should be aware of the center's location and the available retail and service offerings, thereby limiting the need for excessive signage.

The existing signage that is already in place for the shopping center exhibits compatibility with the surrounding residential signage of Ashburn Village. Staff continues to agree that a more coordinated sign package with respect to materials and design may be appropriate for the site, however the size and number of proposed signs is excessive. There are concerns with the number, size and the possible redundancy of information presented on the proposed signs which could contribute to visual clutter and detract from the overall quality of the retail/commercial center.

Staff has identified several areas where signage could be eliminated or reduced in size in order to reduce visual clutter and redundancy to be more consistent with the policies of the Plan.

- According to the application, individual pad sites would be allowed to have up to three building-mounted signs, one freestanding signs, two drive-thru signs, and eight directional signs (total number not specified in the matrix, number based on aggregate square footage) for a total of fourteen signs. Eliminating the freestanding sign and

reducing the number of directional signs would be more consistent with the Retail Plan policies.

- The drive-thru signs being proposed are five times larger than what is permitted in the Zoning Ordinance and they are not in scale with the buildings. Staff also questions the need for two drive-thru signs for each restaurant.
- The Giant grocery store proposes a total of eight signs, three for Giant and five for subtenants. Five subtenant signs is excessive.
- Staff questions the need for end cap units to have three building-mounted signs. The sign shown on the rear of the building could be eliminated.
- It is noted that some of the directional signs propose advertising which may not be allowed in the Zoning Ordinance even through modification. Staff defers to the Zoning Department on this issue. Further, the amount of directional signage proposed is unnecessary as a site visit by staff revealed that all buildings in the shopping center were adequately visible to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Clarification is needed as to the type of Real Estate signs being proposed. It appears that each in-line building would be allowed two monument style signs and each pad site allowed one monument style sign (fourteen signs). This is an excessive number of freestanding monument signs.
- The application proposes temporary signage in the form of balloons, banners, pennants and inflated devices which is prohibited in the Zoning Ordinance. Staff defers to the Zoning Department on this issue.
- The application is proposing that each tenant will have two flush-mounted building signs and one under the canopy sign. The application does not provide adequate justification as to the need for each tenant to have three signs.
- An increase in signage for second floor tenants has also been requested. A general building identification sign is proposed along with a sign for each tenant on the second floor. Staff has concerns with the amount of signage proposed for the office portion of the building as it is unclear how many tenants could be located on the second floor. Signage should identify the building not each individual tenant.

As stated above, this shopping center is existing and is surrounded by the existing residential community of Ashburn Village. While an update of sign design and materials may be appropriate, given the nature of this community serving retail center and its visible location in the neighborhood, increasing the number of the signs would

be excessive. Staff continues to recommend that the number of signs and sign size be reduced as outlined above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The general concept of updating the signage for the Ashburn Village Shopping Center appears to be consistent with the guidelines found in the Revised General Plan and the Retail Plan for unified graphic design. However, at this time Community Planning staff is unable to support the Zoning Modification request for an increase in the amount and size of signage proposed. Staff recommends the following items be addressed:

- Provide documentation to show information on the size, design and number of permitted existing signs in the center and how they compare to the requested sign modifications in order to demonstrate how the future signs will relate to the exiting signage.
- Eliminate or reduce the number and size of the proposed signs in order to reduce visual clutter and redundancy to be more consistent with the policies of the Plan.

cc: Julie Pastor, AICP, Planning Director
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